

# Txt like a Roman

Gavin King and Matthew Nicholls

The succinctness of Latin makes it useful for doctors when writing prescriptions. Could it have wider application in our everyday lives? In texting – or ‘txtng’ – brevity is all. Here are some Latin words and abbreviations that texters may find useful...

**adsum** – ‘I am here’ – a useful way of letting a friend know that you have arrived for a rendezvous.

**ave!** – ‘Great to hear from you!’ or: ‘See you later!’

**c** – abbreviation for *cum* meaning ‘with’.

**domi** – a rare outing for the archaic locative case and a succinct way of telling the people you have been out with that you made it home safely.

**quid novi?** – ‘What’s new? What’s the story?’

**ecce** – ‘Behold!’ or ‘Would you believe it?’

**edo** – ‘I am eating at the moment’ – can be used as a holding text. Perhaps you’ll get back to them later.

**ib.** or **ibid.** – abbreviation for *ibidem* – in the same place, house, bar...as last time.

**via** – ‘on the road’ tells the recipient of your text that you have set off and will get to them eventually.

**mane** – An even briefer version of the texter’s favourite ‘2moro’.

**occupatus** – another holding email: you are busy at the moment (**occupata** for female texters).

**possum** – ‘Can do – it’s in the bag.’

**potus** – drinkies, anyone?!

**s.** – abbreviation for *sine* meaning without.

**veni, vidi, vici** – ‘Success, yes!’

**vale!** – ‘Bye!’

*Gavin King has taught Classics in schools for 15 years and is currently Head of Classics at Dulwich Prep. When he’s not txtng in Latin he can be found cowering behind his sofa watching Lars von Trier’s Medea on YouTube.*

What abbreviations did the ancient Romans themselves use? As Matthew Nicholls explains, if you were an ancient Roman, you would be familiar with all sorts of common abbreviations, which were used on buildings, in inscriptions, in letter-writing... Some ancient abbreviations are still in use in Rome today...

The Romans themselves used abbreviations all the time in their various forms of written communication. Sometimes this was for reasons of speed and efficiency, for a well-known formula that didn’t need writing out in full. It could also be for reasons of economy – it was expensive to commission a tomb inscription, for example – or space (as on a coin, with very limited room for text), or both.

We still do this today, of course – take a look at the Queen’s Latin titles on a pound coin, modelled after those of a Roman emperor, or the many *RIPs* (*requiescat in pace* / rest in peace) in any churchyard.

Here are a few of the more common Latin abbreviations from inscriptions, tombs, coins, and letters.

## On buildings, statues, or walls

**SPQR** *Senatus Populusque Romanus*  
‘The Senate and People of Rome’ – the most famous Latin abbreviation of them all, and one still proudly stamped on manhole covers in Rome today.

**SPF** *Sua pecunia fecit*  
‘Made this from his own money’ – pointing out the generosity of the builder.

**VSLM** *Votum solvit libens merito*  
‘Gladly and deservedly fulfilled his vow’. You see this above on a third-century A.D. funerary altar from Apulia erected to a ‘good son’, and at the top of p. 18 on a bronze plaque dedicated to Jupiter Poeninus, which was found in the ‘Poenine Alps’ at the summit of the Great St Bernard pass.

**OVF** *Orat vos faciat*

This is a common abbreviation in electoral dipinti (painted slogans) in Pompeii: e.g. ‘[The guild of fullers] asks that you make [Marcus aedile this year]’.

## On tombs

**STTL** *Sit terra tibi levis*

‘May the earth be light upon you’ – a common abbreviation on tombs.

**BTOQ** *Bene tua ossa quiescant*

‘May your bones rest in peace’ – another common funerary inscription.

**HMNS** *Hoc monumentum heredem non sequetur*

Seen here on a first or second-century A.D. tomb from Spain, this is a more surprising, but very common, tomb inscription: ‘this tomb shall not pass to the heir.’ A prohibition on future generations putting their own burials into an inherited family tomb, thus ensuring that the original owners of the tomb could indeed rest in peace.

**BMFC** *Bene merenti faciundum curavit*

‘Took care of making this for the well-deserving recipient’ – used where someone other than the deceased, often a family member or heir, built the tomb.

## In letters

The following two abbreviations could be combined.

**SVBEEV** *Si vales, bene est; ego valeo*

A cheery greeting at the start of a letter – ‘if you’re well, that’s good; I’m well too.’ So commonly used that it was reduced to its initials.

**SPD** *Salutem plurimam dicit*

Another conventional opener for a letter, the equivalent of our ‘Dear X’: ‘[Cicero] sends a large greeting [to Atticus].’

## Titles

Romans also liked to leave inscribed copies of their impressive CVs (another Latin abbreviation – *curriculum vitae*) for future generations to admire. Since many of the jobs they did had standardized titles, these too could be abbreviated. Sometimes this turned an unwieldy job title into an unwieldy abbreviation – here

is just one example, turned into a sequence of letters to fit it onto a coin:

*IIIVIR AAAFF triumvir aere argento auro flando feriundo*

The title of Republican mint officials: 'three men for striking (and) casting bronze, silver, (and) gold (coins)'.

*Matthew Nicholls lectures in ancient history at the University of Reading, working on (among other things) books and libraries in the ancient world, and the digital reconstruction of ancient cities.*